A SOW SIMPLE™ GUIDE TO USING HERBS FOR HEALTH

Quick, easy ways to enjoy the health benefits of herbs every day

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How to Use this eBook: Throughout the book, you will see clickable links (blue & underlined). Hover over the link & use your mouse or keypad to click through to tutorials, recipes & more in-depth herb information on my website.
USING HERBS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

If you want to improve your health and wellbeing, one of the most valuable assets you can grow is a potted herb garden. Even with just a few basics like parsley, basil, rosemary and chives positioned close to your kitchen you can benefit greatly on a daily basis.

“Herbs are the friend of the physician and the pride of cooks.” – Charlemagne

With very little effort you can reap an incredible range of rewards by growing and using herbs so let’s ‘tuck in’ to learn how you can benefit:

WHAT EXACTLY IS A HERB?

Whilst botanists define a herb technically as a herbaceous plant (with a non-woody stem), “herbs” generally have a much broader meaning and include a wide range of plants valued for their usefulness including food, flavour, medicine, dyes, pest management and fragrance.

PERSONAL SATISFACTION AND PLEASURE

One of the first things you discover when you grow your own herbs is the act of nurturing, harvesting and using ingredients you’ve grown yourself gives you immense enjoyment and pride. Nothing quite matches the joy and satisfaction you feel when harvesting your own herbs.
and then putting them to good use in meals, a remedy or to enjoy the fresh aroma in your home.

If you create a herb garden outdoors, the physical exercise, fresh air and being close to nature all benefit your health and soul. You can’t help but come back inside feeling invigorated, more peaceful and happy! If you only have room for a window sill herb garden or an indoor micro garden on your kitchen bench, your herbs will provide you even greater pleasure as you see and smell them up close every day.

A SENSORY EXPERIENCE

Herbs each have their own distinctive aroma and smell is the most powerful and sensitive of all our senses. Herbs have a way of delighting us with such a wide variety of fragrances – from sweet to spicy - and tantalise our taste buds in the process.

A sensory garden is vital for children to explore and learn so many things about plants. There’s no better place to start than with the wonderful scents of mint (especially chocolate and peppermint flavours), lemon balm and nasturtiums.

A handful of freshly picked basil or rosemary has an immediate effect on your wellbeing. Just the scent of beautiful fresh herbs can be enough to inspire you to use them in the kitchen!
In addition to enjoying the delicious fragrance and taste of mint, chewing a few fresh leaves can help freshen your breath, relieve sore throats, colds, coughs and aid digestion.

Likewise, inhaling the aroma of a freshly brewed herb tea is a pleasurable experience and the vapours also have added health benefits. A soothing lemon balm tea uplifts the spirits and calming chamomile is a wonderful natural herb to help relax and get to sleep.

Rubbing the leaves of herbs helps release the essential oils and intensifies the fragrance. For example, lemon balm’s flavour and aroma are due mainly to the natural substances citral and citronellal. The leaves* can be crushed and rubbed on your skin to help repel insects whilst outdoors.

* Note that lemon balm leaves may cause contact dermatitis in susceptible individuals.

TIP: Bruise or snip the leaves before adding to herb tea to release more of the beneficial oils which can be inhaled as you drink.

SUPPORT HEALING

Herbs are multi-functional plants that perform many roles including helping our bodies to self-heal in three main ways - detoxing, relieving symptoms and strengthening the body’s ability to resist illness.

There are so many herbs that can be grown in your own ‘home pharmacy’ garden for everyday relief of common ailments like sore throats, colds/flu, bites and stings, headaches and stress. It’s worth considering a few herbs that can be used both in the kitchen AND as medicine.
On our fridge, I keep a list of the minor health issues our family most often has to deal with such as cuts, bruises or a headache. Next to these common ailments, I have listed the herbs we grow that are useful to relieve such symptoms so it’s easy to see at a glance what would be most helpful for health. Then we just pick the herbs we need from the garden and brew up a herbal tea, chew on a few leaves or make a quick remedy. This is our first port of call before getting in the car to drive to the chemist and saves us time and money by being self-reliant. Often the pain or discomfort disappears within a few hours or the same day.

Harvesting lemon balm - helps lessen pain, soothes and heals

NATURAL FLAVOURING

With fresh herbs, just a little can go a long way in terms of flavour. Many people are on restricted diets requiring less salt, sugar and artificial flavourings and if you are looking for natural alternatives, herbs can play a large role in your kitchen as a suitable substitute. They can be used in many meals, not only enhancing the flavour but providing health benefits at the same time.
For example, Stevia is nature’s sweetener and a fresh leaf tastes sweeter than sugar! It is an incredibly easy, beautiful herb to grow. Leaves can be picked and used fresh or dried as a sugar substitute without the detrimental side effects.

Deliciously sweet Stevia leaves (the tiny white flowers are pretty too)

This herb promotes health and healing, increases energy and unlike sugar, inhibits tooth decay. If you prefer your tea or coffee a little sweet, you can pop a few leaves into your mug completely guilt-free!

“Fresh herbs make almost anything taste better.”
– Willi Galloway, author ‘Grow, Cook, Eat’

Herbs like basil, cayenne pepper, nasturtium seeds (dried and ground), aromatic bay leaves, garlic, chives (especially garlic and onion varieties), parsley, savoury, sage, rosemary and thyme can all be used as salt substitutes on their own or in combination.
FRESH vs DRY HERBS

The general rule of thumb when substituting fresh and dry herbs is a simple 3:1 ratio. Dried herbs have a far more potent flavour so you naturally need less than fresh herbs. For 1 portion of dry herbs, replace with 3 times the quantity of fresh herbs. So if your recipe calls for 1 teaspoon of dried herb, substitute with 3 tspns of fresh leaves (or 1/2 tspn ground dried herb).

Herbs with a high moisture content like basil, parsley, coriander and chives tend to lose some of their flavour when dried but freeze well, especially if blanched beforehand. Add chopped fresh herbs to an ice cube tray, cover with oil or water and freeze for individual portions as you need them – even when out of season.

Herbs that retain their flavour when air dried include rosemary, sage, bay leaves, oregano, thyme, mint and dill.

“Extend your harvest: Pick extra leaves during spring and summer growth and preserve for winter use in stews and casseroles by storing when dry.”
HOME MADE HERB SALT

If you’ve ever purchased herb salt, you’ll know it can be quite expensive but you can make your own much cheaper. If you have a surplus of fresh herbs, this is an easy, tasty way to preserve your harvest. Salt helps carry the flavour of your favourite herb. These are two methods you can try:

1. Simply tie string around the base of a bunch of fresh herbs & hang upside down in a dry, breezy spot. The average drying time is around a week but will depend on your climate. When fully dry, the leaves will be crumbly. Take down DRY HERBS & lay on a chopping board. Using a long bladed sharp knife, chop very finely (or grind in a pestle & mortar). Add to sea salt and mix well. Vary quantities according to taste. To minimize the salt content and rely on the herbs for flavour, mix together 1 tablespoon salt & 1/2 cup dried herbs. Store in airtight jars. Hang herb bunches indoors for a delicious aroma. They can also be stored whole in well-sealed containers without mixing with salt.

2. If you’re impatient, chop 2 cups FRESH HERBS into 1/2 cup sea salt on your chopping board until fine. When well mixed, you can use immediately while the herbs are still fresh on meat, vegies or egg dishes or whatever you wish. To dry the mix, lay out evenly on a flat oven tray on top of baking paper. Leave overnight or a couple of days depending on your climate until dry. Label then store as above.

Herb Salt Combinations:

- 1-2 cloves peeled garlic + 1/2 cup fresh sage, rosemary & thyme.
- Lemon zest, parsley, dill & chives (great with seafood).
- Or mix in some bay, oregano, mint, sage, basil or coriander/cilantro.

“Store dried herbs in a cool dark place to preserve colour and flavour.”

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Herb Flavoured Oil & Vinegar

You can also preserve herbs in oils, honey or vinegar, infusing their delicious flavours and opening up a whole world of tasty combinations.

Wash and dry herbs well and add to a sterile bottle or jar. You can layer herbs like basil, rosemary and tarragon with olive oil and then use for salad dressings and marinades once the flavours are infused.

These same herbs plus sage, dill, marjoram, thyme, mint and savoury also work well to flavour vinegar. Add your clean, dry herbs to a sterile bottle with a cork or non-metal lid, then fill with a good-quality vinegar.

Leave in a sunny spot to infuse the flavours, shaking every few days. The flavours will need about 3 weeks to develop. Once you’ve taste tested and it’s to your liking, strain the herbs and return the herbal vinegar to the bottle and refrigerate. You can, if you wish, add a sprig or two of dried herbs to the bottle so it looks beautiful too.
DIGESTIVE AID

There are many herbs that help start the digestive process by stimulating the digestive juices in your mouth. Herbs like chamomile, lemon balm, lemon verbena, stevia, fennel and thyme are all beneficial for the digestive system.

Carmineative herbs like dill and lemon balm help to warm up the digestive tract, speed up and improve the digestive process and reduce the symptoms of indigestion. All good reasons to include these herbs in your meals or enjoy as herbal teas.

“Fresh herbs contain digestive enzymes - the perfect garnish for meals.”

Baby herbs grown as microgreens contain digestive enzymes and are the perfect garnish for many meals not only for presentation and flavour but also to kick start the breakdown of food in your gut.

HOW TO MAKE HERB SEASONED FLOUR

I use a mortar and pestle to grind fresh leaves from lemon flavoured herbs like lemon myrtle, lemon balm and lemon thyme together, before adding to a tablespoon or two of flour with a pinch of sea salt. This Lemon Seasoned Flour is simple and quick to make and can be used on seafood, poultry or any other dish that requires lemon seasoning. Mix up your own favourite herbs with flour for a subtle, robust or spicy flavour! Other easy combinations include dried chives (especially onion and garlic for their intense flavours), rosemary, oregano and thyme. Chilli, coriander/cilantro and mint seasoned flour is perfect for coating meats used with stir fries. Best of all you save money - no trip to the shops to buy a packet of seasoning anymore! Make your own seasonings at home in just minutes on the kitchen bench.
Fresh raw baby herb greens are **living foods and packed with enzymes**. Eating plant food enzymes like microgreens and fresh herbs not only benefit the digestive process but also help increase your energy, health and youthfulness.

**HIGH IN CHLOROPHYLL**

Chlorophyll (the green colour pigment in plants) is a vital element in supplying herb plants with the nutrients they need for health and growth. Chlorophyll is produced in all plants via photosynthesis and by eating green herbs in your daily diet, you benefit from this banquet of nutrition in so many ways.

Chlorophyll is a powerful blood cleanser, alkalizer and blood builder and helps increase the oxygen in your cells – all important functions for health and disease prevention. This may be the reason for the saying:

"When you are green inside you are clean inside." – Dr Bernard Jensen

As a general rule, the darker the green colour, the more chlorophyll it contains.
Dark leafy green herbs such as parsley, **rocket/arugula** and coriander/cilantro are all good sources of chlorophyll. They can be grown as **microgreens** and snipped as garnishes on meals or leaves picked when mature.

The slightly peppery leaves of the herb rocket (arugula) are rich in chlorophyll.

The nutrients in herbs can be assimilated quickly by the body especially when taken as **herbal teas**, fresh in salads, blended or juiced in green smoothies – all easy ways to “green” your diet!

*Chlorophyll is the “green blood” or life force of plants produced through photosynthesis. When we eat green leaves, we absorb the sun’s energy stored in the chlorophyll molecules. Without green plants there would be no life.*

**RICH IN VITAMINS AND MINERALS**

Freshly picked herbs that are eaten quickly afterwards provide our bodies with a wide variety of essential nutrients that are vital to health.

One easy way to ensure you get the benefits of home grown herbs is to always serve meals or drinks with a **fresh herb garnish**. These can be in the form of **microgreens**, a fresh sprig or leaves picked from a mature plant.
Parsley for example contains Vitamins A, B, B2, B3, C and E and valuable sources of calcium, potassium, magnesium, manganese, iron, copper, iodine, sodium and phosphorus and has many health benefits.

It's an excellent source of Vitamin C – vital to so many body functions including building your immune system. **2 tablespoons of parsley provide you with 13% of your daily Vitamin C requirement.** Try it in pesto, juices and as a garnish.

"I believe parsley is a must-grow herb for health."

**HERB HAIRCUTS**

To keep your herbs growing an abundance of leaves, they need to be pruned or given a ‘haircut’ regularly! Snip fine herbs with scissors and woody herbs with sharp secateurs below a leaf node. You can trim your herbs into an attractive shape and extend your harvest with a little regular attention. If you don’t need fresh herbs at the time, preserve them for later use.
OUTSTANDING SOURCE OF ANTIOXIDANTS

You are no doubt aware that antioxidants help fight free radicals in the body (such as chemicals and environmental pollutants). Antioxidants also play a role in preventing cancer and help build immune resistance to many other diseases. Herbs contain many antioxidants and including them in your daily diet is one way to build your health, immunity and delay aging.

“With degenerative diseases plaguing many people today, we need to realise that pills and surgery are not fixing the problems. We need to realise that to maintain our immune system, vitality and health, a diet containing living enzymes and antioxidant rich foods and herbs, is essential.” - Isabell Shipard, herbalist & author

NATURAL ANTIBIOTICS

There are many herbs that help build your body’s resistance to a wide range of illnesses without the negative impact of taking chemically manufactured antibiotics that often cause side effects. Brilliant herbs that contain natural antibiotic properties and are easy for you to grow include: nasturtiums, garlic, aloe vera, coriander/cilantro, ginger, lemon grass, oregano, mustard, sage, thyme and echinacea.

“Where you find garlic, you find good health”- Spanish proverb
PAIN RELIEF

Did you know that many herbs including lemon balm, gotu kola, herb robert, aloe vera and feverfew contain pain-relieving properties?

Pain can be a major problem for many people and herbs may not only help minimise the symptoms but can also work on the cause.

Aloe vera for example, can help relieve the pain of cuts, stings, bites and burns as well as start the healing process, by penetrating the skin tissue as deep as seven layers. It is one of the most valuable herbs to grow and respected for its soothing, moisturising and fast healing properties.

The humble culinary herbs oregano, rosemary and thyme also have pain relieving properties. They all contain anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic and analgesic compounds and can be used on their own or combined in a Pain Relief Tea.

"A wise man ought to realize that health is his most valuable possession."
- Hippocrates

HOW TO MAKE PAIN RELIEF TEA

To make: Add 1 teaspoon of dried herbs or 3 teaspoons of fresh leaves to a cup of boiling water and infuse for 5-10 minutes. Strain and drink.
PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE

If you believe “prevention is better than cure” and are interested in natural remedies, herbs are an incredible tool in your Preventative Medicine Kit. The health choices we each make are personal. Whether you choose to work with doctors and health care professionals as a first step or prefer to take a more proactive approach to preventing illness, home grown herbs can play a supportive role to help boost your health and wellbeing.

“All that man needs for health and healing has been provided by God in nature, the challenge of science is to find it.” – Paracelsus (1493-1541)

* Always consult your healthcare professional before using any herbal remedy (especially if pregnant, nursing, or taking other medicines).

I hope you’re inspired to start your herb garden or add to what you’ve already got growing to improve your diet and nourish your health. I’d love to help you keep learning and connect with others who share the same passion.

I look forward to sharing more tips, techniques, organic strategies and inspiration for growing an abundant edible garden with you. You can learn a barrow load of sustainable ways to build health and wellbeing at themicrogardener.com, join a growing global community of like-minded organic urban gardeners on The Micro Gardener Facebook page, Pinterest and Twitter where I share new ideas every week.

I invite you to check out all the resources available in The Micro Gardener Store plus a wide range of helpful products, tools, pots, plants, organic and heirloom seeds, gardening/cooking books and garden supplies in my Amazon shop. If you choose to make a purchase, I’d appreciate your support as I receive a small commission and this helps me maintain my website & bring you more FREE tutorials and resources.

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Brought to you by

Anne Gibson
THE MICRO GARDENER

“Health is not valued until sickness comes.”
- Thomas Fuller

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